Characters

- *African Slaves — Voices of African Slaves*
- 1ST Man (Prayer — Husband of Dademi)
- 2ND Man (Curser)
- 3RD Man (Struggler)
- 1ST Woman (Prayer)
- 2ND Woman (Screamer — Attacked)
- 3RD Woman (With Child)
- Dancers
- Musicians
- Children
- Voices AND BODIES IN THE SLAVE SHIP
- Old Tom Slave
- New Tom (Preacher)
- *White Men — Voices of White Men*
- Captain
- Sailor
- Plantation Owner — "Eternal Oppressor"

Act

Whole theater in darkness. Dark. For a long time. Just dark. Occasional sound, like ship groaning, squeaking, rocking. Sea smells. In the dark. Keep the people in the dark, and gradually the odors of the sea, and the sounds of the sea, and sounds of the ship, creep up. Burn incense, but make a significant, almost stifling, smell come up. Pee. Shit. Death. Life processes going on anyway. Eating. These smells and cries, the slash and tear of the lash, in a total atmos-feeling, gotten some way.

African Drums like the worship of some Orisha. Obatala. Mbwanga rattles of the priests. BamBamBamBamBoom BoomBoom BamBam.

Rocking of the slave ship, in darkness, without sound. But smells. Then sound. Now slowly, out of blackness with smells and drums staccato, the hideous screams. All the women together, scream. AAAAAIIIIEEEEEEEEEEE. *Drums come up again, rocking, rocking; black darkness of the slave ship. Smells. Drums on up high. Stop. Scream*. AAAAAAIIIIEEEEEEEEE. *Drums. Black darkness with smells*.

Chains, the lash, and people moaning. Listen to the sounds come up out of the actors. Sounds thrown down

into the hold. AAAAIIIEEEEEEEEE. *Of people, dropped down in the darkness, frightened, angry, mashed together in common terror. The bells of the ship. White Men's voices, on top, ready to set sail.*

VOICE

OK, let's go! A good cargo of black gold. Let's go! We head West! We head West.

(*Long laughter*)

Black gold in the West. We got our full cargo.

ANOTHER VOICE

Aye, Aye, Cap'n. We're on our way. Riches be ours, by God.

VOICE

Aye, riches, riches be ours. We're on our way. America!

(*Laughter*)

(*There is just dim light at top of the set, to indicate where voices are . . .*)

(*African Drums. With the swiftness of dance, but running into the heaviness the dark enforces. The drums slow. The beat beat of the darkness. "Where are we, God?" The mumble murmur rattle below. The drone of terror. The voices begin to beat against the dark.*)

PRAYER

Ooooooooo, Obatala!

SCREAMER

Shango!

PRAYER

Ooooooooo, Obatala . . .

(*Children's crying in the hold, and the women trying to comfort them. Trying to keep their sanity, too*)

WOMAN WITH CHILD

Moshake, chile, calm, calm, be you. Moshake chile. O calm, Orisha, save us!

SCREAMER

AAAIIIIEEEEEEE

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

Quiet woman! Quiet! Save your strength for your child.

SCREAMER

AAAIIIIEEEEEEE

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

Quiet, foolish woman! Be quiet!

WOMAN WITH CHILD

Moshake, baby, chile, be calm, be calm, it give you, ooooooo.

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

Shango, Obatala, make your lightning, beat the inside bright with paths for your people. Beat. Beat. Beat.

(*Drums come up, but they are walls and floors being beaten. Chains rattled. Chains rattled. Drag the chains.*)

(*We get the feeling of many people jammed together, men, women, children, aching in the darkness. The chains. The whips, magnify the chains and whips. The dragging together. The pain. The terror. Women begin to moan and chant songs, "African Sorrow Song," with scraping of floor and chains for accompaniment*)

CURSER

Fukwididila! Fukwididila! Fukwididila! Fuck you, Orisha! God! Where you be? Where you now, Black God? Help me. I be a strong warrior, and no woman. And I strain against these chains! But you must help me, Orisha. Obatala!

STRUGGLER

Quiet, you fool, you frighten the women!

(*Women still chanting, moaning. Children now crying. Mothers trying to comfort them. Feeling of people moving around, tumbling over each other. Screaming as they try to find a "place" in the bottom of the boat, and then the long stream of different wills, articulated as screams, grunts, cries, songs, et cetera*)

STRUGGLER

Pull, pull break them . . . Pull

PRAYER

Oh, Obatala!

WOMAN WITH CHILD

Oh, chile . . . my chile, please, please get away . . . you crush . . .!

STRUGGLER

Break . . . Break . . .

ALL

Uhh, Uhhh, Uhhh, Uhhh, OOOOOOOOOOOOOOO.

WOMEN

AAAAAIIIIIIIEEEEEEE.

ALL

Uhhh, Uhhh, Uhhh, Uhhh, OOOOOOOOOOOO.

WOMEN

AAAIIIIEEEEEEE.

(*Drums down low, like tapping, turn to beating floor, walls, rattling, dragging chains, percussive sounds people make in the hold of a ship. The moans and pushed-together agony. Children crying incessantly. The mothers trying to calm them. More than one child. Young girls afraid they may be violated. Men trying to break out, or turning into frightened children. Families separated for the first time*)

SCREAMER

Ifanami, Ifanami . . . where you?? Where you?? Ifanami.

(*Cries*)

Please, oh, God.

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

Obata . . .

(*Drums beat down, softer . . . humming starts . . .* hummmmmm, hummmmmmmmm, *like old black women humming for three centuries in the slow misery of slavery . . .* hummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm, hummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm)

(*Lights flash on white men in sailor suits grinning their vices . . . voices down . . .* hummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm mmmmmmm. *Lights to light white people are sudden, very bright and blinding. The white men begin to laugh and point, as if they were pointing at the filth, misery, and degradation of the Black People. They laugh:* HAAAAAAHAAAAHAAHAAHAAAHAAHAAHAHAHAHA. *When they are outlined again they are rolling in merriment. Pointing, dancing, jumping up and down*, HAHAHA hahaha Haaaa . . .)

(*Laughter is drowned in the drums. Then the chant-moan of the women . . . then silence. Then the drums, softer, then the humming, on and on, in a maddening, building death-patience, broken by the screams, and the babies and the farts, and the babies crying for light, and young wives crying for their men. Old people calling for God. Warriors calling for freedom. Some crying out against the white men.*

STRUGGLER

Devils! Devils! Devils! White beasts! Shit eaters! Beasts!

(*They beat the walls, and try to tear the chains out of the walls*)

White shit eaters.

WOMAN WITH CHILD

Aiiiiieeeeeeeeeee.

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

God, she's killed herself and the child. Oh, God. Oh, God.

(*Moans. Moans. Soft drums, and the constant, now almost maddening, humming . . .* hummmmmmmmmmmmmmm, hummmmmmmmmmmmmmmm . . . *like mad old nigger ladies humming forever in deathly patience . . .* hummmmmmm hummmmmmmm hummmm.)

PRAYER

She strangled herself with the chain. Choked the child. Oh, Shango! Help us, Lord. Oh, please.

SCREAMER

Why you leave us, Lord?

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

Dademi, Dademi . . . she dead, she dead . . . Dademi . . .

(*Hear man wracked with death cries, screams*)

Dademi, Dademi!

(Hummmmmmmmmm, Hummmmmmmmmmmm, Hummmmmmmmmmmmm, Hummmmmmmmmmmmmmm. *Drums low, and moans . . . the chains, and Black People pushed against each other, struggling for breath and room to live. The Black Man weeps for his woman. The Black Woman weeps for her man together in the darkness, some calling for God*)

SCREAMER

Oh, please, please don't touch me . . . Please . . .

(*Frantic*)

Ifanami, where you?

(*Screams at someone's touch in the dark, grabbing her, trying to drag her in the darkness, press her down against the floor*)

Akiyele . . . please . . . please . . . don't, don't touch me . . . please, Ifanami where you? Please, help me . . . Go . . .

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

What you doing? Get away from that woman. That's not your woman. You turn into a beast, too.

(*Scuffle of two men turning in the darkness trying to kill each other. Lights show white men laughing silently, dangling their whips, in pantomime, still pointing*)

STRUGGLER

Devils. Devils. Cold walking shit.

(*All mad sounds together.*)

(*Humming begins again. Bells of ship. Silence, and moans, and humming, and movement in the dark of people. Sliding back and forth. Trying to stay alive, and now, over it, the constant crazy laughter of the sailors*)

SAILORS

AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAAAAAHHAHHHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAH

STRUGGLER

I kill you, devils. I break these chains.

(*Sound of men struggling against heavy chains*)

I tear your face off. Crush your throat. Devils. Devils.

PRAYER

Oh, Oh, God, she dead . . . and the child.

(*SILENCE/Sound of the sea . . . fades*)

ALL

(*Humming*)

HMMMMMMMMMM HMMMMMMMMMM HMMMMMMMMMMMMMM HMMMMMMMMM HMMMMMMMMM

(*Lights on suddenly, show a shuffling "Negro." Lights off . . . drums of ancient African warriors come up . . . hero-warriors. Lights blink back on, show shuffling black man, hat in his hand, scratching his head. Lights off. Drums again. Black dancing in the dark, with bells, as if free, dancing wild old dances. Bam Boom Bam Booma Bimbam boomama boom beem bam. Dancing in the darkness . . . Yoruba Dance. Lights flash on briefly, spot on, off the dance. Then off. Then on, to show The Slave, raggedy ass, raggedy hat in hand, shuffling toward the audience, shuffling, scratching his head and butt. Shaking his head up and down, agreeing with massa, agreeing, and agreeing, while the whips snap. Lights off, flash on, and the sailors, with hats changed to show them as plantation owners, are still laughing; no sound, but laughing and pointing, holding their sides, and they laugh and point*)

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

(*In darkness*)

Yassa, boss, yassa Massa Tim, yassa, boss.

(*Lights up*)

I'se happy as a brand new monkey ass, yassa, boss, yassa, Massa Tim, yassa, Massa Booboo, I's so happy I jus don't know what to do. Yass, massa, boss, you'se so han'some and good and youse hip, too, yass, I's so happy I jus' stan' and scratch my ol' nigger haid.

(*Lights flash on Slave doing an old-new dance for the boss; when he finishes he bows and scratches.*)

(*Lights out . . . the same* hummmmmm *rises up . . . with low drums, but the hum, grown louder, drowns it out . . .* hummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm hummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm. *The laughter now drowns out the humming, the same cold, hideous laughter*)

WOMAN WITH CHILD

(*Whispering after death*)

Moshake . . . Moshake . . . Moshake chile, calm yourself, love.

(*Woman runs down into soft weep, with no other distracting sound, just her moaning sad cry, for her baby. Chains. Chains. Dragging the chains. The humming*. Hummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm)

SCREAMER

AIEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

ALL

Uhh, Uhhh, Uhhh, Uhhh, Ooooooooooooo.

(*Silence*)

(*Soft at first, then rising. Banjos of the plantation*)

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

Reverend what we gon' do when massa come?

(*He sounds afraid*)

CURSER

We gon' cut his fuckin' throat!

(*Banjos*)

(*Humming . . .* Hummmmmmmmmmm)

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

Reverend, what we gon' do when the white man come?

CURSER

We gon' cut his fuckin' throat.

SLAVE 3

Devil. Beast. Murderer of women and children. Soulless shit eater!

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

Reverend Turner, sir, what we gon' do when the massa come?

CURSER

Cut his godless throat.

(*Lights flash up on same Tomish slave, still scratching his head, but now apparently talking to a white man*)

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

Uhh, dass right, Massa Tim . . . dey gon' 'volt.

VOICE

What? Vote? Are you crazy?

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

Nawsaw . . . I said 'volt . . . uhhh . . . revolt.

(*Laughter, now . . . rising behind the dialogue*)

VOICE

When, boy?

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

Ahhh, t'night, boss, t'night . . . they say they gon' . . . 'scuse de 'spression . . . cut you . . . uhh fuckin' . . . uhh throat . . .

VOICE

(*Laughs*)

And who's in charge of this "'volt"?

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

Uhh . . . Reverend Turner . . . suh . . .

VOICE

What?

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

Uhh . . . dass right . . . Reverend Turner . . . suh . . . Now can I have dat extra chop you promised me?

(*Screams now, as soon as the lights go down* AIEEEEEEEEEEIEIEIEIEIEIE *Gunshots, combination of slave ship and break up of the revolt. Voices of master and slaves in combat*)

VOICE

I kill you, niggahs. You black savages.

ANOTHER VOICE

White Beasts. Devil from hell.

(*Voice, now, humming, humming, slow, deathly patient hum* HUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM)

(*Drums of Africa, and the screams of Black and White in combat.*)

(*Lights flash on Tom, cringing as if he is hiding from combat, gnawing on pork chop. Voice of white man laughing in triumph. Another chop comes sailing out of the darkness. Tom grabs it and scoffs it down, grinning, and doing the deadape shuffle, humming while he eats*)

WOMAN WITH CHILD

(*Dead whispered voice*)

Moshake, Moshake . . . chile . . . calm calm . . . we be all right, now . . . Moshake, be calm . . .

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

White beasts!

ALL

Uhh. Ohhh. Uhhh, Uhhh

(*As if pulling a tremendous weight*)

Uhh. Ohhh. Uhhh. Uhhh. Uhhh.

PRAYER

Ifanami . . .

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

Dademi . . . Dademi.

SCREAMER

Akiyele . . . Akiyele . . . Lord, husband, where you . . . help me . . .

STRUGGLER

. . . touch my hand . . . woman . . .

SCREAMER

Ifanami!

WOMAN WITH CHILD

Moshake!

(*Now the same voices, as if transported in time to the slave farms, call names, English slaves names*)

ALL

(*Alternating man and woman losing mate in death, or through slave sale, or the aura of constant fear of separation . . .*)

Luke. Oh my God.

STRUGGLER

Sarah.

PRAYER

John.

SCREAMER

Everett. My God, they killed him.

ALL

Mama, Mama . . . Nana. Nana. Willie. Ohhh, Lord . . . They done.

ALL

Uhh. Uhhh. Uhh. Obatala. Obatala. Save us. Lord. Shango. Lord of forests. Give us back our strength.

(*Chains. Chains. Dragging and grunting of people pushed against each other*)

(*The sound of a spiritual. "Oh, Lord, Deliver Me, Oh Lord." And now cries of* "JESUS, LORD, JESUS . . . HELP US, JESUS . . .")

HUSBAND OF DADEMI

Ogun. Give me weapons. Give me iron. My spear. My bone and muscle make them tight with tension of combat. Ogun, give me fire and death to give to these beasts. Sarava! Sarava! Ogun!

(*Drums of fire and blood, briefly loud and smashing against the dark, but now calming, dying down, till only the moans, and then the same patient humming . . . of women, now, no men, only the women . . . strains of "The Old Rugged Cross" . . . and only the women and the humming . . . the time passing in the darkness, soft, soft, mournful weeping* "Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . : .")

(*Now lights flash on, and Preacher in modern business suit stands with hat in his hand. He is the same Tom as before. He stands at first talking to his congregation:* "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." *Then, with a big grin, speaking in the pseudo-intelligent patter he uses for the boss. He tries to be, in fact, assumes he is, dignified, trying to hold his shoulders straight, but only succeeds in giving his body an odd slant like a diseased coal chute*)

NEW TOM

Yasss, we understand . . . the problem. And, personally, I think some agreement can be reached. We will be nonviolenk . . . to the last . . . because we understand the dignity of Pruty McBonk and the Greasy Ghost. Of course diddy rip to bink, of vout juice. And penguins would do the same. I have a trauma that the gold sewers

won't integrate. Present fink. I have an enema . . . a trauma, on the coaster with your wife bird shit.

WOMAN WITH CHILD

(*Black woman's voice screaming for her child again*)

Moshake! Moshake! Moshake! beeba . . . beeba . . . Wafwa ko wafwa ko fukwididila

(*Screams . . . moans . . . drums . . . mournful death-tone . . . The Preacher looks, head turned just slightly, as if embarrassed, trying still to talk to the white man. Then, one of the black men, out of the darkness, comes and sits before the Tom, a wrapped-up bloody corpse of a dead burned baby as if they had just taken the body from a blown-up church, sets corpse in front of Preacher, Preacher stops. Looks up at "person" he's Tomming before, then, with his foot, tries to push baby's body behind him, grinning, and jeffing, all the time, showing teeth, and being "dignified"*)

NEW TOM

Uhhherr . . . as I was sayin' . . . Mas' uh . . . Mister Tastyslop . . . We Kneegrows are ready to integrate . . . the blippy rump of stomach bat has corrinked a lip to push the thimble. Yass. Yass. Yass . . .

(*In background, while Preacher is frozen in his "Jeff" position, high hard sound of saxophone, backed up by drums. New-sound saxophone tearing up the darkness. At height of screaming saxophone, instruments and drums come voices screaming . . .*)

STRUGGLER

Beasts! Beasts! Beasts! Ogun. Give me spear and iron. Let me kill . . .

(*Humming as before . . . long . . . incredible patience, as if it would go on forever, turns into* OMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM: *All take it up, as the climax rises*)

(*Lights down. Ommmmm sound, mixed with sounds of slave ship, saxophone and drums. Sounds of people thrown against each other, now as if trying, all, to rise, pick up. Sounds of people picking up. Like dead people rising. And against that, the same sounds of slave ship. White laughter over all of it. White laughter. Song begins to build with the saxophone and drums. First chanted*)

ALL
Rise, Rise, Rise
Cut these ties, Black Man Rise
We gon' be the thing we are . . .

(*Now all sing "When We Gonna Rise"*)

When we gonna rise up, brother
When we gonna rise above the sun
I mean, when we gonna lift our heads and voices
When we gonna show the world who we really are
When we gonna rise up, brother
When we gonna take our own place, brother
Like the world had just begun
I mean, when we gonna lift our heads and voices
Show the world who we really are

Warriors-Gods, and lovers, The First Men to walk this star
Yes, oh yes, the first Men to walk this star
How far, how long will it be
When the world belongs to you and me
When we gonna rise up, brother
When we gonna rise above the sun
When we gonna take our own place, brother
Like the world had just begun?

(*Drum — new sax — voice arrangement*)

(*Bodies dragging up, in darkness*)

(*Lights on the Preacher in one part of the stage. He stands still, jabbering senselessly to the white man. And the white man's laughter is heard trying to drown out the music, but the music is rising*)

(*Preacher turns to look into the darkness at the people dragging up behind him, embarrassed at first, then beginning to get frightened. The laughter, too, takes on a less arrogant tone.*)

WOMAN WITH CHILD

Moshake. Moshake.

STRUGGLER

Ogun, give me steel.

ALL

Uhh. Uhh. Ohhh. Uhhh. Uhhh.

(*Humming rising, too, behind. Still singing "When We Gonna Rise." Preacher squirms, turns to see, and suddenly his eyes begin to open very wide, lights are coming up very, very slowly, almost imperceptibly at first. Now, singing is beginning to be heard, mixed with old African drums, and voices, cries, pushing screams, of the slave ship. Preacher begins to fidget, as if he does not want to be where he is. He looks to boss for help. Voice is breaking, as lights come up and we see all the people in the slave ship in Miracles'/Temptations' dancing line. Some doing African dance. Some doing new Boogaloo, but all moving toward Preacher, and toward voice. It is a new-old dance, Boogalooyoruba line, women, children all moving, popping fingers, all singing, and drummers, beating out old and new, and moving, all moving. Finally, the Preacher begins to cringe and plead for help from the white voice.*)

NEW TOM

Please, boss, these niggers goin' crazy; please, boss, throw yo' lightnin' at 'em, white Jesus boss, white light god, they goin crazy! Help!

VOICE

(*Coughing, as if choking on something, trying to laugh because the sight of Preacher is funny . . . still managing to laugh at Preacher*)

Fool. Fool.

NEW TOM

Please boss, please . . . I do anything for you . . . you know that, boss . . . Please . . . Please . . .

(*All group merge on him and kill him daid. Then they turn in the direction of where the voice is coming from. Dancing. Singing, right on toward the now pleading voice*)

VOICE

HaaHaaHaaHaa

(*Laugh gets stuck in his throat*)

Uhh . . . now what . . . you haha can't touch me . . . you scared of me, niggers. I'm God. You cain't kill white Jesus God. I got long blond blow-hair. I don't even need to wear a wig. You love the way I look. You want to look like me. You love me. You want me. Please. I'm good. I'm kind. I'll give you anything you want. I'm white Jesus savior right god pay you money nigger me is good god be please . . . please don't . . .

(*Lights begin to fade . . . drums and voices of old slave ship come back*)

ALL

Uhh. Ohh. Uhh. Ohh. Uhh. Ohh. Uhh. Ohh.

(*And then the terrible humming, turning to the* OMMMMMMMMMMmmmmmmmmmmm *sound, broken now, by the finally awful scream of the killed white voice*)

VOICE

AWHAWHAEHAHWAWHWHAHW

(*All players fixed in half light, at the movement of the act. Then lights go down. Black*)

(*Lights come up abruptly, and people on stage begin to dance, same hip Boogalooyoruba, fingerpop, skate, monkey, dog . . . Enter audience; get members of audience to dance. To same music Rise Up. Turns into an actual party. When the party reaches some loose improvisation, et cetera, audience relaxed, somebody throws the preacher's head into center of floor, that is, after dancing starts for real. Then black*)